

The 2003 Accenture and MIT Digital Government Awards
Pilot/Prototype Nomination
DRAFT DOCUMENT ONLY

Please note:

- Throughout the nomination form, the term "pilot/prototype" refers to a program that is still in the development stages or has not yet been made operational. This includes a program that may be operational for an extremely limited timeframe or intended for an internal user group.
- This is a preformatted form. Please use your "Tab" key to move from field to field.
- Complete each of the questions as completely, but as **concisely**, as possible. Many of the text boxes have **maximum word allotments of 350 words**.
- All fields on the form must be completed. If the question is not applicable to your pilot/prototype, indicate "not applicable" or "N/A" in the appropriate field.
- Please note that this document **may only be used as a draft document**. All final nominations will need to be submitted using the online form at <http://www.digitalgovawards.org/>.
- **Nominations must be submitted by March 27, 2003**

You are nominating a pilot/prototype program:

Name of organization or agency to be nominated: Delaware Department of Technology and Information

Name of specific pilot/prototype to be nominated: Access Delaware Project

URL of specific pilot/prototype being nominated: http://www.state.de.us/dti/access_de.htm

Note: Please provide the specific URL to the area of the website that best represents the program you wish to have evaluated for this award program. If you submit the top level of a website, as in the case of a portal, ensure that the proposed path through the site is clearly described for the judges in the 500-word summary. If the website is not generally accessible by the public, or requires special PINs, passwords or other specific instructions for access, please indicate this in the URL field, and provide additional detail in the 500-word summary.

Jurisdiction of organization: (check one) *

- ☐ Federal
☒ State
☐ Local (county/municipality)
☐ Higher Education

Service category: (check all that apply) *

- ☒ Government to citizen
☐ Government to business
☐ Government to government
☐ Citizen to citizen
☐ Higher education

Please complete all of the following questions:

* required fields

1. **What is the problem(s) or issue(s) addressed by this pilot/prototype? ***

One of the primary functions of State government is to provide information to citizens. In fact, recent research by the Pew Internet & American Life Project suggests that the primary purpose for citizen use of government web sites is information retrieval. A recent report by the Project found that "the most popular activities at government Web sites relate to the search for information" (The Rise of the E-Citizen: How People Use Government Agencies' Web Sites: April 3, 2002). However, states continue to struggle with Internet access issues and ways to bridge the Digital Divide. The Access Delaware Project is an initiative that is focused on providing alternative mechanisms for Delaware agencies to deliver web-based information and services to citizens.

2. **Who are the users or user groups served by this pilot/prototype? ***

*(Please include specific numbers, if possible.) **

The State of Delaware "Voice Portal" -- the public facing component of the Access Delaware Project - has housed two prototype VoiceXML applications since its inception in September 2002. The first (the Internet Access Locator) allows citizens to search for locations in their neighborhoods that provide public Internet access. Users can search by speaking the name of a city or town, speaking a zip code or by entering a zip code on their touch-tone phone. This application is free to the public and when publicly launched will be available to any Delaware citizen without home Internet access. The second application (operation from October 24 -- November 5, 2002) allowed any Delaware citizen to locate their polling place for the statewide general election. The prototype polling locator application received over 1,400 calls in the 13-day period leading up to the 2002 general election (60 percent of which were received the day before and the day of the election).

3. **What are the goals and objectives of the pilot/prototype? How does it reflect or support the core mission of the organization? ***

*(Please include specific numbers, if possible.) **

The Access Delaware project is focused on providing new channels for the public to access government services and information. Specifically, the project encourages the use of VoiceXML by Delaware agencies to provide phone-based access to Delaware citizens to services and information previously available only on the "visual" web. Statistics compiled by federal and state researchers suggest that as much as 40 to 45 percent of Delaware citizens lack ready access to an Internet-connected computer. One of the fundamental goals of state government is to provide access to information by citizens. Finding ways to bridge the Digital Divide (i.e., by using new technologies like VoiceXML) is one way of achieving this goal. The two primary objectives of the pilot project were to validate the use of VoiceXML to deliver web-based services and information to Delaware citizens, and to establish a platform that could be used to support multiple agency VoiceXML applications going forward.

4. **Please describe the pilot/prototype. (Maximum of 500 words.) ***

The purpose of this pilot project was to evaluate the use of the Voice Extensible Markup Language (VoiceXML) as a way of providing telephone access to web-based government services and information. In September of 2002, the State of Delaware Voice Portal (866-276-2353) was created. The initial application housed in the new Voice Portal was a VoiceXML-based "Internet Access Locator System." This system allows Delaware citizens without access to the Internet at home or at work to quickly and easily locate a facility in their neighborhood (e.g., a library, community center, senior center, etc.) with free public Internet access. This system is currently functional, but it is being refined by state IT staff and has not yet been widely marketed to the public. In October of 2002, another VoiceXML-based application was deployed to support the November 5th general election. This "Polling Place Locator" application leveraged investment in an existing web-based polling locator system (<http://elba2.state.de.us/>) by adding a voice-based presentation layer to the existing application logic and backend systems. Usage statistics show that the voice presentation of this web-based service increased its use by an estimated 20 percent. Based on the outcome of this pilot project, Delaware is now planning to more broadly deploy VoiceXML technology as a way of providing enhanced access to government services and information.

5. **When is the pilot/prototype expected to be operational? ***

The State of Delaware Voice Portal is currently functioning and can be accessed by calling 866-276-2353 (toll free). However, this service has not yet been marketed to the public and is not yet considered fully operational. Based on the outcome of this pilot project, Delaware is now working with state agencies to more broadly deploy VoiceXML technology as a way of providing enhanced access to government services and information. Several new VoiceXML applications are in development and expected to be launched as part of the public announcement of the Delaware Voice Portal in the Spring of 2003. New applications will include a voice-enabled tax refund status applications (leveraging an existing web-based tax refund application), and several voice-enabled unemployment insurance applications. VoiceXML has now received "candidate recommendation" status from the World Wide Web Consortium. And while some intellectual property issues among the contributors to the VoiceXML specification need to be worked out before it can receive full web standard status, we are confident that VoiceXML will continue to be widely supported and utilized by developers, and will eventually receive the full web standard designation. We believe that it will soon become an important tool for the State in fulfilling its service delivery mandate to citizens and taxpayers.

6. **What will be the most significant achievements and benefits of this pilot/prototype? (Please be specific.) ***

Through this pilot project, we have realized several important goals. First, we have validated the concept of using VoiceXML to make highly valuable information (e.g., the location of a public internet site) available through a toll free telephone number, accessible from any ordinary or cellular phone. Second, we have established a VoiceXML infrastructure (in concert with an outside partner) that can be used in the future by any state of Delaware agency to develop and deploy a VoiceXML application for its customers. Finally, we have validated the concept of leveraging existing web applications with a visual (HTML or XHTML) user interface to create a VoiceXML interface that can be made available to the public through a central Voice Portal with a toll free number. Our pilot has demonstrated that we can make highly important information available to the public in a way that transcends traditional barriers to Internet access, and that we can leverage investment in existing web-based information and applications in doing so.

7. **How will the pilot/prototype demonstrate creativity and innovative thinking? ***

Most government efforts to address the Digital Divide are focused on improving access to Internet-connected desktop computers -- funding programs that support placement of computers in public access points (community centers), donating used PCs to schools, subsidizing the cost of internet services, etc. And while Delaware's approach to the problem of the Digital Divide include this some of these same approaches, we believe that our efforts will be significantly enhanced by the addition of a solution that utilizes the "voice web." VoiceXML is a technology that makes any telephone (even a rotary phone) an Internet device. This is important for governments because access to telephones far surpasses Internet-connected computers (statistics from the NTIA suggest telephone penetration rates nationally of about 94 percent). Additionally, using telephones to provide access to web content helps address other basic Internet access issues like computer literacy -- a voice-based interface is much more natural and user friendly to individuals with inadequate computer training. VoiceXML is not a panacea for the problem of the Digital Divide. However, we believe that it is an important component in our strategy to address this problem and fulfill our fundamental mission of providing ready access to government information and services.

8. **How do you plan to measure the effectiveness of the pilot/prototype? (Please be specific.) ***

Throughout our pilot project, we closely monitored call volumes and characteristics to ensure that applications worked properly and that interfaces and menus were constructed effectively. As this project moves to its next phase in the months ahead, we will continue this monitoring and actively instruct agencies on how to incorporate call volume statistics into their existing web site statistics monitoring processes. We expect that by providing multiple access channels to web-based applications (e.g., a visual -- HTML -- channel, and a voice -- VoiceXML -- channel), usage will increase. Our goal is to not only track these usage statistics closely, but to demonstrate that by increasing the use of these web-based services that agencies will realize efficiencies and savings. For example, in the 13-day period leading up to the November 5th general election, our Polling Place Locator application received over 1,400 calls totaling over 3,700 minutes of phone time. If these citizen

inquires had been fielded by state employees, it would have taken a full time employee almost a week and 1/2 to answer all calls. Instead, employee time was more effectively directed to other election-related duties to the benefit of this agency.